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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001739

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA WORRIES ABOUT BELARUSAN RECOGNITION OF  
ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Since Venezuela's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian policymakers have warned of a "cascade of recognitions" that could occur should Belarus follow suit. Belarusian President Lukashenko's September 15 statement that the Parliament would consider recognition when it convened October 2 has convinced Georgian leaders to reach out to the U.S. and Europe to urge Belars not to recognize. During a September 16 meeting with the Quad Ambassadors, Georgian FM Vashadze took this a step further by telling the German, French and UK Ambassadors (with the U.S. Charge present) that if Belarus recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the EU did not take steps to expel Belarus from the Eastern Partnership, then Georgia would have to consider withdrawing itself. Georgian President Saakashvili made a similar statement to visiting EUR DAS Kaidanow September 15 (reported septel). Although emphasizing that they were speaking without instructions, all three Ambassadors denied the linkage between possible recognition and participation in the Eastern Partnership, warning that Georgia rather than Belarus would pay the price of closing the door on Europe if it quit the Partnership. The Charge agreed that breaking with Europe would be unwise for Georgia. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Georgia's political leaders have been visibly upset by Venezuela's decision to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and have warned the Charge and Embassy officers that this decision and Russia's continuing activities could result in a "cascade of recognitions" by the end of the year. FM Vashadze told the Charge that Georgian diplomats have been active at the UN and around the globe discouraging countries from recognizing. He noted that the Georgians have also been working with the EU and Spain to put pressure on Latin American states not to recognize. Although resigned to the fact that more countries in Latin America and Africa could succumb to Russian pressure and recognize, FM Vashadze expressed concern that a decision by Belarus to recognize could turn the tide in Europe -- and result in all of the former soviet republics (with the exception of Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan) recognizing the territories.

¶3. (C) During a September 16 meeting with Quad Ambassadors (delivering a demarche expressing concern about the Georgian seizure of ships in the Black Sea), FM Vashadze noted that he had been informed by his missions abroad that Belarus was under great pressure from Russia to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Georgian press had reported the same day that Belarusian President Lukashenko had announced that the Parliament would consider recognition when it convened October 2. FM Vashadze informed the three European Ambassadors (with the Charge looking on) that if Belarus recognized and the EU did not take steps to expel Belarus from the Eastern Partnership, then Georgia might have to consider withdrawing from the Eastern Partnership. Vashadze lamented the fact that the founding documents of the Eastern Partnership had not included a specific reference to the importance of territorial integrity. Nonetheless, the Georgians believed that they could not remain partners with the EU, if the EU did not take action to show its

disagreement with any future Belarusian decision to recognize.

¶4. (C) Emphasizing that they were all uninstructed on this point, the three European Ambassadors sought to dissuade Vashadze from this course of action. They stressed that QVashadze from this course of action. They stressed that Belarus might very well be kicked out of the Eastern Partnership because of decisions to close the OSCE mission and continuing refusals to honor international legal and human rights obligations. However, regardless, they urged Vashadze not to take this step since it would mean that Georgia, by turning its back on Europe, would be paying the price for Belarus' recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They also argued that this course of action would not be understood in Brussels since supporting the strict EU policy of non-recognition was a different policy from membership in the Eastern Partnership. The Charge noted that although not a member of the EU, the U.S. strongly supported Georgia's non-recognition policy, but would also find it unfortunate if Georgia chose to withdraw from the Eastern Partnership.

¶5. (C) After the meeting, FM Vashadze told the Charge that this was not yet a Georgian policy decision, but that such a move was under consideration if Belarus recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He hoped that his words to the European Ambassadors would spark messages back to Brussels and help keep the pressure on Belarus not to recognize. In a separate conversation after the meeting, the German Ambassador told the Charge that she had been alarmed by the possibility of Georgia's withdrawal from the Eastern Partnership and had reported the conversation with the FM back to Berlin and was awaiting a reaction.

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¶6. (C) Comment. The European Ambassadors were surprised by the meeting and by Vashadze's forceful presentation. However, a number of Georgian officials including President Saakashvili had already mentioned the possibility of leaving the Eastern Partnership if the EU did not respond to future Belarusian recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to EUR DAS Kaidanow during her September 14-15 meetings in Tbilisi. At this point, the threat of withdrawal appears to be more of a lever to put pressure on the EU to help hold back Belarusian recognition. However, should Belarus recognize and the EU do nothing, it is very possible that Georgia will feel it must take the dramatic step of withdrawing from the Eastern Partnership. End Comment.  
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